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Budget ax poised over Pajaro Valley schools: Adult school funding slashed \$1 million in budget proposal

By DONNA JONES - Santa Cruz Sentinel

Posted: 02/15/2011 04:44:03 PM PST

Updated: 02/15/2011 04:47:53 PM PST

WATSONVILLE — Pajaro Valley school leaders will consider slashing \$1 million from adult education today.

The proposal is part of a \$2.5 million package of potential cuts under consideration to meet a March 15 deadline for notifying teachers of possible layoff.

Also proposed as the district struggles with increasing expenses and stagnant or falling funding are adding more students to kindergarten through third-grade classrooms and reducing nurses and staff in transportation, technology, human resources and finance departments.

The district also would use \$3.3 million in one-time federal education jobs funds to lessen the impact, but that would permanently cancel plans to use the money to re-hire some clerks and maintenance workers and keep elementary libraries open another year.

Separate cuts are likely to migrant education, special education and child development due to specific state funding reductions.

But adult education would take the biggest hit, leaving the program with less than half its current funding to provide classes in 2011-12.

"I'm stunned," said director Nancy Bilich. "It would have a significant impact on our community, no doubt about it, a profound impact."

Bilich, who also serves on the Watsonville City Council, noted the high rates of unemployment in the city, as high as 30 percent in the past year and said the adult school has been expanding career and technical education. She said English as a Second Language classes are "full to the brim," mornings and nights. The school also helps dropouts earn high school diplomas or GEDs.

The adult school has seen its funding drop between \$1 million and \$1.5 million in the past three years due to state and district takeaways, she said.

"We have given so much already, but we're still serving the community as best we can," Bilich said.

Brett McFadden, the district's chief business officer, said the proposed reductions weren't set in stone, but needed to be considered to make the layoff notification deadline.

The district has been through this process before, however, and the cuts proposed at the beginning have tended to make it to the final budget. To a large extent, the decisions made now tie the district's hands. After the March 15 notices go out, other programs that would result in layoffs of teachers can't be considered.

McFadden said the reductions considered today won't be enough to keep the district's budget in the black if voters don't pass tax extensions in June and the state cuts education further.

After cutting \$14 million in the past two years, the district has few options left, he said.

"The situation remains for us between horrible and catastrophic," McFadden said.

IF YOU GO

Pajaro Valley school board

WHAT: Consideration of \$2.5 million in potential budget cuts that will result in layoff notices.

WHEN: 7 p.m. today

WHERE: District board room, 292 Green Valley Road, Watsonville

DETAILS: www.pvUSD.net

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